

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-20

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: CI, PINT

SUBJECT: LETELIER TRIAL RUMORED

1. THERE FOLLOW EXCERPTS FROM FEB 28 WASHINGTON POST
ARTICLE RUMORING IMMINENT TRIALS OF HIGHRANKING ALLENDE
GOVT OFFICIALS, INCLUDING FORMER AMBASSADOR TO US
LETELIER:

2. QUOTE. FORMER CHILEAN AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON ORLANDO
LETELIER HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM CHILE'S VIP PRISON CAMP
ON DAWSON ISLAND AND TAKEN TO SANTIAGO FOR A CLOSED-DOOR
MILITARY TRIAL, ACCORDING TO CONGRESSIONAL SOURCES IN
WASHINGTON.

3. BUT A SPOKESWOMAN AT THE CHILEAN EMBASSY HERE SAID
YESTERDAY THAT THE TRIALS OF LETELIER AND THE OTHER "BIG
BOYS" OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE LATE SALVADOR ALLENDE, DE-
POSED IN A MILITARY COUP LAST SEPTEMBER, HAD NOT YET
BEGUN.

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4. LETELIER HAS BEEN "IN AND OUT" OF SANTIAGO TO SERVE AS

A WITNESS IN TRIALS OF OTHERS WHO WORKED UNDER HIS ORDERS,
ACCORDING TO THE SPOKESWOMAN.

5. REPORTS HERE SAY THAT LETELIER, JOSE TOHA, CLODOMIRO
ALMEYDA AND AN UNIDENTIFIED FOURTH PERSON WERE TAKEN TO

SANTIAGO FEB 18 FOR TRIALS BEFORE MILITARY TRIBUNALS
THE FOLLOWING DAY. TOHA AND ALMEYDA, LIKE LETELIER,
SERVED AS MINISTERS IN THE ALLENDE GOVERNMENT. ALL WERE
MEMBERS OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY, NOW BANNED.

6. CHILE'S CURRENT AMBASSADOR, GEN. WALTER HEITMANN, HAD
TOLD A MEETING IN WASHINGTON SOME WEEKS AGO THAT THE
TRIALS OF LETELIER AND OTHER FORMER CABINET MINISTERS
WOULD BE OPEN AND BEFORE CIVIL COURTS, WITH THE PRESS
ALLOWED TO ATTEND.

7. YESTERDAY THE EMBASSY SPOKESWOMAN SAID THAT IT HAD NOT
YET BEEN DETERMINED WHETHER LETELIER AND THE OTHER
MINISTERS WOULD BE TRIED BEFORE CIVIL OR MILITARY COURTS,
AND ADDED THAT - DESPITE REPORTS HERE THAT THE CHARGE
WOULD BE "HIGH TREASON" - THE CHARGES HAD NOT YET BEEN
DETERMINED. SHE SAID IT WAS LIKELY THE CHARGES WOULD BE
MORE SPECIFIC THAN THAT.

8. THE REPORTED TRANSFER CAME WITHIN DAYS OF THE PUBLI-
CATION IN BRAZIL OF AN INTERVIEW BY THE BRAZILIAN MAGA-
ZINE VISAO WITH LETELIER, WHO CALLED DAWSON ISLAND,
WHERE HE WAS IMPRISONED, AN "ICY LIMBO". END QUOTE.

9. POUCHING FULL TEXT.

10. DEPT HAS RECEIVED SEVERAL CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRIES
RECENT DAYS REGARDING REPORT THAT LETELIER, ALMEYDA,
TOHA AND POSSIBLY SERGIO BITAR ARE NOW ON TRIAL. DEPT'S
REPLY HAS BEEN THAT WE HAVE SEEN NOTHING WHICH WOULD
CONFIRM SUCH RUMOR. WE ARE ALERT TO POSSIBILITY THAT
STORY MAY HAVE BEEN GENERATED BY PROXIMITY OF FEB 28
FORUM ON CHILE (STATE 38858). IN ANY EVENT, EMBASSY
SHOULD REPORT SOONEST ANY CHANGE IN STATUS OF VIP DE-
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TAINES WHICH COMES TO LIGHT. LETELIER IS OF PARTICULAR
INTEREST IN VIEW OF HIS LONG TENURE IN WASHINGTON. CASEY

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